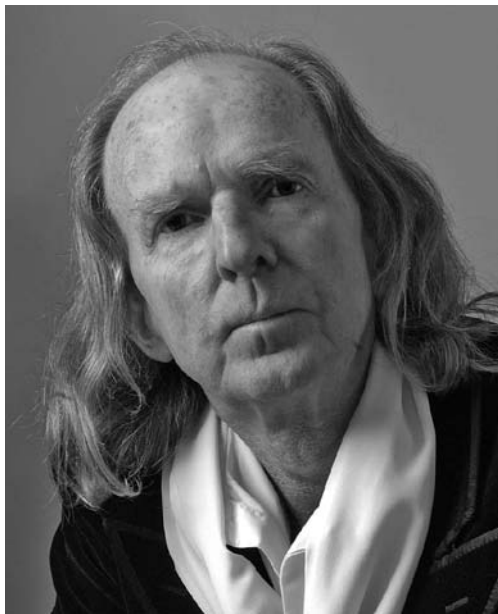


A PORTRAIT John Tavener



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Preface

Quietly, with an unassuming expression, head bent forward, Tavener speaks with natural eloquence about tradition, his inspirations, and his fundamental belief in beauty and simplicity. A thoughtful, gentle composer, he has a rare empathy with his listeners, despite his immersion in 'foreign' cultures and religions. His music touches so widely the people of his own country and attracts musicians as varied as Steven Isserlis and Björk. Its stasis and accessibility is ready fuel for those critics who slate its simplicity, as if it has failed in a pretence to be otherwise. But these criticisms are unwittingly complimentary, because simplicity is its goal – an intentional antidote to what Tavener believes is the over-intellectualised art of western society. As the composer continues to follow inexorably his own path, this portrait explores his life and music to date and celebrates his sixtieth birthday year:

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Track List

CD I

Music

- [1] **In Alium**
Section A
Eileen Hulse, soprano / Ulster Orchestra / Takuo Yuasa
4:07
Naxos 8.554388
- [2] **To a Child Dancing in the Wind**
Movement 1: He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven
Heidi Grant Murphy, soprano / Auréole – Laura Gilbert, flute;
Mary Hammann, viola; Stacey Shames, harp
5:16
KOCH International Classics: 3-7486-2 HI
- [3] **The Lamb**
Choir of St John's College, Cambridge / Christopher Robinson
3:47
Naxos 8.555256
- [4] **The Tyger**
Choir of St John's College, Cambridge / Christopher Robinson
5:18
Naxos 8.555256
- Ikon of Light**
- [5] Movement 1: FOS I, DOXA
5:00
- [6] Movement 2: PIU INTENSITA
The Sixteen / Members of the Duke Quartet / Harry Christophers
3:19
CORO: COR16015
- [7] **Mandelion for organ (extract)**
Kevin Bowyer, organ
3:22
Nimbus: NI 5580/1

- [8] **Chant for guitar (extract)** 3:41
Jonathan Richards, guitar Divine Art: 25008
- [9] **Ikon of Saint Cuthbert of Lindisfarne (extract)** 2:36
Durham Cathedral Choir / Ian Shaw, organ / James Lancelot, director Priory: PRCD 296
- [10] **The Protecting Veil for cello and orchestra** 15:02
Section I
Maria Kliegel, cello / Ulster Orchestra / Takuo Yuasa Naxos 8.554388
- [11] **Mary of Egypt** 7:21
Act III: Bless Duet
Patricia Rozario, Mary / Stephen Varcoe, Zossima / Aldeburgh Festival Ensemble / Lionel Friend Regis: RRC2026
- [12] **Akhmatova Songs for soprano and string quartet** 2:51
No. 5: The Muse
Patricia Rozario, soprano / The Vanbrugh Quartet Hyperion: CDA67217
- Diódia for string quartet** 5:52
- [13] Solemn – 5:52
- [14] [rehearsal letter I] 4:55
The Vanbrugh Quartet Hyperion: CDA67217
- [15] **Song for Athene** 5:39
Choir of St John's College, Cambridge / Christopher Robinson Naxos 8.555256

CD 2

- | | | |
|-----|--|---|
| [1] | Zodiacs for piano | 2:23 |
| | Thalia Myers, piano | NMC DO57 |
| [2] | Prayer of the Heart | 15:10 |
| | Björk / Brodsky Quartet – Andrew Haveron, violin / Ian Belton, violin | © 2003 Wellhart Ltd / One Little Indian Ltd |
| | Paul Cassidy, viola / Jacqueline Thomas, cello | Not previously released |
| [3] | Ikon of Eros | |
| | Movement 2: Ερως (Éros) | 7:51 |
| | Jorja Fleezanis, violin / Minnesota Orchestra and Minnesota Chorale / Paul Goodwin | Reference: RR-102CD |
| [4] | Mother and Child (extract) | 4:33 |
| | Tenebrae / Nigel Short | Signum: SIGCD501 |

John Tavener Reflects... A Recorded Interview

- | | | |
|------|---|------|
| [5] | 'My earliest musical memories...' | 8:21 |
| [6] | 'I saw in the Russian Orthodox Church...' | 8:14 |
| [7] | 'I think The Protecting Veil...' | 8:04 |
| [8] | 'The Icelandic pop singer Björk...' | 6:18 |
| [9] | 'The fact that I've been given...' | 4:11 |
| [10] | 'When my publishers ring...' | 5:39 |
| [11] | 'The only goal...' | 5:05 |

TT 75:55

Introduction

Throughout his career, Sir John Tavener has been a unique and influential figure on the contemporary music scene. From his days as an audacious young composer at the forefront of the avant-garde movement in the late sixties and seventies, through to his present-day rejection of many of the standard aesthetic principles on which the western classical music tradition is based, he seems to have caused controversy whichever direction he has moved in. On the surface, he can seem like a figure of contradiction: on one hand, he moves in the austere world of royalty and religious institutions; on the other, he can be seen communing in a glamorous world of film and pop stars. His critics have jumped on these apparent paradoxes to denounce Tavener as a carefully and cleverly manufactured PR product, but this is a superficial judgement. All his paths are taken with the utmost integrity and conviction, and unified by one consistent, obsessive goal: a desire to find what is true in the deepest sense of the word. Different people and different traditions refer to this truth by different names, but whether you call it salvation, the soul, nirvana, cosmic consciousness or simply the 'essence' of life, Tavener's one and only aim is to bring himself, and his audiences, closer to an ultimate truth through his music.

Tavener is often labelled an 'Orthodox' composer. It is true that for twenty years the liturgy and traditions of the Eastern Orthodox Church strongly influenced his music, but this is only part of the story. Today he has moved towards a Universalist view in which all religions are seen as equally valid, and elements of Orthodoxy are rarely found in the music he is currently writing. Throughout his career there have been many influences, not only from different religious traditions but from secular sources as well. The unifying factor

between them all is not any one particular tradition, it is the desire to express truth and beauty through his music.

Tavener's view is that we live in an over-intellectualised society in which the strong emphasis placed on issues that feed the ego, such as academic success, money and achievement – all the things on which our society is based – has distanced us from who or what we really are, from the 'essence' of life. Few would disagree that the increasing importance placed on image in western countries tends towards a shallower, dumbed-down society. Tavener would apply this viewpoint on a wider scale. For him, the downward spiral started with the Renaissance. In musical terms, he can acknowledge the genius of masters like Beethoven and Wagner, though he finds the sophistication and 'clever' techniques of the music lacking in this essence. This view may seem outrageous to many music-lovers, but it is a view which strikes a strong chord with his own philosophy and it is this belief that leads him to write music which has had an extremely significant impact on the industry. With this in mind, if one looks at Tavener's career to date as a whole, it can be seen as a process of unlearning. From his early, complex works, he has gradually pared down his music, removing the intellectual systems and techniques, to get as near as he can to a state where only the 'essence' remains. This has not always made him popular with the critics, but it is his firm and absolute conviction that this is the right direction for him. Once, when accused of his music having no substance, he retorted 'but I'm not interested in substance, it's the essence of the music that counts!' Given the popularity of his music, and his long-standing success, it is difficult to deny that he has a point.

This is the introductory chapter of John Tavener: A Portrait.
The full biographical essay, illustrated with photographs, is available to buy.
For more details, please visit www.naxos.com.